

## Ebola Virus Disease

In recent years, there have been Ebola outbreaks in some African countries. There have never been any cases of Ebola in British Columbia or anywhere else in Canada.

### What is Ebola Virus Disease?

Ebola virus disease is a very serious and often deadly illness caused by the Ebola virus. The Ebola virus is transmitted through the blood and bodily fluids of an infected individual. Infection can include flu-like symptoms that can lead to organ failure.

### How is the Ebola virus spread?

The Ebola virus can spread to humans through close contact with the blood, secretions, organs or other bodily fluids of infected animals. In Africa, the Ebola virus has been transmitted to humans when they touch or eat infected animals such as fruit bats, chimpanzees, gorillas, and monkeys.

The Ebola virus does not spread easily from person-to-person, or through casual contact. Once a person is infected, the Ebola virus can only be spread from person-to-person in the following ways:

- Direct contact of an open wound or mucous membranes with infected body fluids. Although all body fluids including blood, semen, saliva, urine, vomit, breast milk, vaginal secretions, sweat, tears and feces may contain the Ebola virus, the most infectious are blood, vomit and feces.
- Direct contact with objects that have been contaminated with the body fluids of an infected person. Examples include needles and other medical equipment, bed linen, or soiled clothing.
- Direct contact of an open wound or mucous membranes with the body of someone who has died from the Ebola virus.

The Ebola virus cannot be spread through the air, in food or water, or by having contact with someone who is infected but does not have any symptoms. Those infected with the Ebola virus are only contagious once they begin to show symptoms.

People with Ebola virus disease are most contagious during the late stages of the infection when they are very ill.

As long as precautions are taken, the risk of getting the Ebola virus is very low.

### What are the signs and symptoms of infection with the Ebola virus?

Symptoms that indicate infection with the Ebola virus appear from 2 to 21 days after exposure to the virus. Initial symptoms include:

- fever;
- weakness;
- fatigue;
- muscle pain;
- severe headache;
- rash;
- abdominal pain;
- vomiting;
- diarrhea;
- sore throat; and
- redness of the eyes.

About a week after these initial symptoms, infected patients may start recovering or progress to more severe symptoms such as bleeding, difficulty breathing and coma. They may also be in shock, and their organs may stop working.

Between 55% to 80% of people infected with the Ebola virus may die.

### Who is at risk for exposure to the Ebola virus?

Those at higher risk of exposure to the Ebola virus include:

- Health care workers working with infected patients.
- Family members caring for an infected person.

- Laboratory workers working with the Ebola virus.
- People visiting or living in an area affected by an Ebola outbreak.

If you have been in an area affected by an Ebola outbreak, if you have come into direct contact with an infected patient, or if you have been in direct contact with an object contaminated by an infected patient, you should call your health care provider or local Medical Health Officer. You may be asked to self-isolate and/or monitor your temperature and symptoms for 21 days.

If you have had contact and develop symptoms, call your health care provider or Medical Health Officer immediately. To find contact information for your local public health unit, visit the Immunize BC Public Health Unit Finder [www.immunizebc.ca/finder](http://www.immunizebc.ca/finder).

### How is infection with the Ebola virus diagnosed and treated?

The only way to confirm an infection with the Ebola virus is to have a blood test.

There are no approved vaccinations for the Ebola virus and no specific treatment. Experimental drugs and vaccines are currently being evaluated but are not yet approved for use in humans.

People infected with Ebola are given supportive care which includes: balancing fluids and electrolytes, maintaining vital signs and treating any complicating infections.

### How can the spread of the Ebola virus be prevented?

The best way to prevent the spread of the Ebola virus is to avoid contact with infected people or animals, or surfaces soiled with infected body fluids. If you are in close contact with someone who is infected with the Ebola virus, or body fluids infected

with Ebola, you need to take precautions to prevent infection. For information about what precautions need to be taken, speak to your health care provider or local Medical Health Officer.

### Can pets get infected or sick with the Ebola virus?

There have been no reports of dogs or cats becoming sick with the Ebola virus or spreading the disease to people or other animals. If your pet does come in contact with Ebola, consult a veterinarian for advice.

### For More Information

For more information about the Ebola virus, visit:

- BC Centre for Disease Control: Ebola [www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/ebola](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/ebola)
- Government of Canada: Ebola virus disease <http://healthycanadians.gc.ca/diseases-conditions-maladies-affections/disease-maladie/ebola/index-eng.php>
- World Health Organization: Ebola virus disease [www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs103/en/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs103/en/)

To see if there are any recent travel alerts related to the Ebola virus, visit the Public Health Agency of Canada Travel Health Notices [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/notices-avis/index-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/notices-avis/index-eng.php).

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit [www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles) or your local public health unit.

Click on [www.HealthLinkBC.ca](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca) or call 8-1-1 for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.

